

patients and assigned them randomly to one of four diets: the Atkins Diet, the Zone diet, Weight Watchers, and Dean Ornish's Plan for one year. They found that one-third drop out by one year, and most lost only 5% of their total body weight. On the plus side, more importantly, the data did show that even at these modest levels of weight lost, the risk of heart disease dropped 7–15%.

## REFERENCE

1. Squires S. Popular Diets Yield Modest Results. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A19027-2003Nov9>.

## The Issue: Is Obesity a Disease or Not?

George Dawson, MD

Experts are now trying to lay the foundation in a general sense, in classifying obesity as an illness. For now, the Internal Revenue Service has indicated yes. Therefore, weight loss treatments prescribed by a physician are tax deductible.

Critics of this proposition, however, contend that obesity is not an illness. They contend that obesity is akin to smoking or not exercising, either of which is considered a disease.

Meanwhile, federal officials have begun debating the merits of such a classification for a terribly vexing national health problem, overweight and obesity. I suspect the proponents for the classification will win, and the nation will be the better for it.

## REFERENCE

1. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A2o22o-2003Nov9>.

## Microwaving Food and Health?

George Dawson, MD

A Spanish report suggested that microwaving vegetables such as broccoli destroys disease-fighting chemicals. The report noted that when microwaved, broccoli lost 97% of its flavinoids and a host of other chemicals, compared to a loss of 47% during pressure cooking, a 66% loss from boiling. The French method of cooking was felt to be better. That is, quick and simple steaming.

## REFERENCE

1. Microwaving Zaps Nutrients. United Press International. [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_14319.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_14319.html)

## Two Black Medical Schools Slammed

George Dawson, MD

A troubling report in the Hartford Courant (Connecticut) of June 29 and 30, 2003, paints a disturbing picture of some graduates of Howard and Meharry Medical Schools. The three-part report reviewed the disciplinary records of physicians from three national databases and concluded that graduates of four schools predominated. Of the two American schools, Howard and Meharry tended to have more physicians reported in the databases. Because of the sensitive political nature of the Meharry and Howard findings, the authors went through some length at trying to explain the reasons for the results. They listed as possible reasons for the discrepancies: entrenched racism in medicine and the society as a whole, differing selection pools in potential students and faculty compared to pre-affirmative action

days, and long-term discriminatory funding to the afflicted schools. Critics charge that the report was too simplistic to draw any meaningful conclusions from the data reviewed.

Meanwhile, the "Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce" has been making recommendations to increase the anemic number of minority physicians.

The commission is composed of 15 panel members and is headed by former Secretary of HHS, Louis Sullivan, MD. It was appointed to hold hearings in seven American cities to ascertain recommendations for increasing minority representation in American healthcare.

Currently, for example, African Americans are 2.5% of the American physician workforce, despite being 12.3% of the total population.

## REFERENCES

1. Dolan J, Julien A. Med Schools: Four That Flunk. *The Hartford (Connecticut) Courant*. June 29, 2003.
2. Julien A, Dolan J. Black Medical Schools Struggle to Compete. *The Hartford (Connecticut) Courant*. June 30, 2003.
3. Opinion: Diversifying medicine: The time is now. [www.ama-assn.org/amed-news/200311/17/edsa117.htm](http://www.ama-assn.org/amed-news/200311/17/edsa117.htm).

## Diets Rich in Olive Oil, Fish, Fruit, and Vegetables Are Key to Good Health

George Dawson, MD

Experts from Greece have confirmed long-held assumptions that diet rich in olive oil fish fruit and vegetables are independent in their effects on lowering heart disease rates.

In a study of 3,000 men and women, scientists found that regardless of body mass index,

physical activity, age, sex, or education there were no signs of reduced signs of inflammation. Only the diet seem to alter this observation by revealing less inflammatory changes or findings.

## REFERENCE

1. Richwine L. Mediterranean Diet Is Good for Your Heart. [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_14609.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_14609.html).

## Shocking Report on Extent of Unsafe Injection Used in Developing Nations

George Dawson, MD

Researchers from the World health Organization recently reported that a disturbing one of three injections given in developing nations are either unsafe or use dirty equipment.

The infectious disease risks of this troubling practice are quite obvious. They include HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis A, B, C, and other related ailments.

Overall, the researchers estimated that one-third of new Hepatitis B and almost all Hepatitis C infections are caused by dirty needles. They noted that most needles are reused or poorly sterilized.

Even more shocking, the researchers suggested that 60% of the 16 billion injections given per year are unnecessary.

## REFERENCE

1. One in Three Injections in Poor Nations Is Unsafe. Reuters. [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_14574.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_14574.html).

## School Based 'Project Alert' Has Some Success

George Dawson, MD

A largely middle class based smoking and alcohol abuse pre-

vention program has shown some effectiveness in seventh- and eighth graders.

Apparently, the project began in 1995 and is used in some middle schools in all fifty states. The program emphasizes harm prevention and reduction in tobacco and alcohol use among other illicit drugs.

Critics of the program argue that it is too little too late because most students, by the middle school years, have already started experimenting with drugs.

The report in the American Journal of Public health looked at middle school students from South Dakota and noted significant declines in smoking initiation and reductions rates.

## REFERENCE

1. Norton, A. School Program Cuts Drug, Tobacco Use. [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_14549.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_14549.html).

## Professionals Take Action for Healthy Kids

Tackle a national problem that's been brewing for 30 years, a problem threatening the current and future well-being of our nation's children, a problem gobbling up more and more of our nation's financial resources? Produce solutions and take action in a single year? Impossible! But that's just what has happened.

Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK), a nonprofit organization chaired by former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher, has brought together 39 national education and health organizations and government agencies, spurred the creation of 51 state teams, garnered nearly 2,000 members nationwide and caught the attention of the U.S. Government

Accounting Office and the National Football League—all in just one short year. The AFHK initiative—cited by the GAO as a major grassroots force in the fight against childhood obesity and awarded \$2 million by the NFL in support of its efforts—was launched last October at the national Healthy Schools Summit, an historic meeting chaired by Dr. David Satcher with Mrs. Bush serving as the honorary chair.

Health professionals know the statistics all too well: overweight rates have doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the last 20 years, type-2 diabetes is rapidly increasing among children, and healthcare costs for overweight and obese children are skyrocketing. Now at "epidemic proportions in the United States," says Dr. Satcher's 2001 report, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, overweight and obesity represent a serious and growing health and economic issue.

Our nation's school system, says Dr. Satcher, is one of the key sites for addressing this crisis. Because schools help communities meet the needs of all children, school-based efforts represent the best opportunity to promote American children's current and future well-being—and health professionals must lend their expertise to take action for healthy schools.

To learn more about the Action for Healthy Kids initiative and to find out how you can get involved in your state team, visit the AFHK website at <http://www.ActionForHealthyKids.org>.